NPL Site Narrative for GE - Housatonic River

GE - HOUSATONIC RIVER
Pittsfield, Massachusetts

The General Electric (GE) - Housatonic River site is located in Pittsfield, Berkshire County, Massachusetts, extending along the river from the GE facility in Pittsfield to Woods Pond in Lenox. The site consists of waste sources at the GE facility in Pittsfield, other areas in Pittsfield where polychlorinated biphenyl (PCB) wastes from the GE facility have been disposed, and soils contaminated by the migration of GE wastes via the Housatonic River. The site has been evaluated based on six waste source areas: 11 former oxbows of the Housatonic River that have been filled with soils containing GE wastes, a PCB spill at GE Building 68, approximately 8 miles of PCB-contaminated floodplain soils, two landfills, and areas of contaminated soils along East Street and at Allendale School. The presence of PCB contamination in river sediments, soils, and groundwater has been documented through a series of investigations conducted by GE, the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (MA DEP), and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) spanning two decades.

The GE plant in Pittsfield has historically been the sole producer and major handler of PCBs in western Massachusetts, and is the only known source of PCB wastes discovered in the Housatonic River sediments and floodplain between Pittsfield and Lenox. During the 1940s, efforts to straighten the Pittsfield reach of the Housatonic River by the City of Pittsfield and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, resulted in 11 former oxbows being isolated from the river channel. These areas were filled in with materials that were later discovered to contain PCBs and other hazardous substances. In or around 1968, a PCB (Aroclor 1260) storage tank located in Building 68 of the Pittsfield GE facility collapsed, releasing liquid Aroclor 1260 onto the riverbank soil and to Housatonic River sediments. Based on visual observation, contaminated soils and sediments were excavated by GE and eventually land filled, however significant contamination remains as a result of this release. GE is conducting response actions for the spill in accordance with a CERCLA 106 Order issued by EPA Region 1.

Numerous studies conducted since 1988 have documented PCB contamination of soils within the floodplain of the Housatonic River downstream of the GE plant and Former Oxbows. The extent of PCB contamination roughly coincides with the 10-year floodplain of the Housatonic River, and is believed to result from the redistribution by flooding of PCB wastes released from the Former Oxbows, the Building 68 Spill, and other sources at the GE Pittsfield facility. In some cases, the contaminated soil is located on residential properties and within 200 feet of the residences on these properties. Other contaminated areas include parts of the Audubon Society's Canoe Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary and the Housatonic River Valley State Wildlife Management Area.

The Housatonic River was closed to all but catch and release fishing from Dalton, Massachusetts to the Connecticut border by the MA DEP in 1982 as a result of PCB contamination in river sediments and fish tissues. Concerns expressed by local residents regarding possible health effects resulting from exposure to PCB contamination are being investigated by the Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MA DPH).

For more information about the hazardous substances identified in this narrative summary, including general information regarding the effects of exposure to these substances on human health, please see the Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry (ATSDR) ToxFAQs. ATSDR ToxFAQs can be found on the Internet at ATSDR - ToxFAQs (http://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/toxfaqs/index.asp) or by telephone at 1-888-42-ATSDR or 1-888-422-8737.